

Goals of Public Meeting and Internet Forum

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The purpose of this public meeting is to gather information about the safety impact of driver distraction when using in-vehicle technologies, such as wireless phones, navigation systems, wireless Internet, and night vision systems. and to call national attention to this issue, which probably has been the most talked about safety issue this year. The concern is about the difficulties that drivers can have when they take their eyes and minds off the road to operate these devices. We are not at the stage where we think we know "the final answer" There's probably not even agreement that we know what the questions are. But the hope is that by sharing information and different perspectives, we will be better able to direct our research to provide an understanding of what measures are needed to improve safety while maintaining the benefits of in-vehicle technologies. As a researcher, that is certainly my hope. We also hope to achieve several other goals:

One is to develop a common understanding of the direction technology is going, how to measure the characterize the nature of the safety problem, any existing initiatives being undertaken to minimize the safety problem, and current research findings and directions

In addition, we hope to involve all stakeholders in this process (researchers, the technology industry, the motor vehicle industry, and others)

Finally, we hope to provide background information for discussions at a planned technical workshop of experts to identify additional initiatives and needed research. This is one way we hope to involve the stakeholders. We have not worked out the details yet, but expect to hold the workshop this Fall.

Recognizing that a one day public meeting is not sufficient to help us in this endeavor, I decided to see if we could provide a forum for additional input using the Internet. Why the Internet?

Since the topic of driver distraction is one that interests the public as well as the industry and research community, the Internet allows the public to join in along with these other groups. It is a medium that facilitates sharing of technical papers as well as personal experiences and opinions. Since we're dealing with a technical issue that has developed in part because of the Internet, it seemed logical to use the Internet as the medium of information exchange (as long as people didn't do it while driving). Also, since we're dealing with an issue that is being discussed in many countries, especially Europe where they are already taking steps to address the safety issue - the Internet seemed a logical choice to solicit international inputs. Since this is the first time NHTSA has done this, we

didn't know how well it would work, especially given the short time we had to put it together. Well, a funny thing happened on the way to the Internet Forum. It worked!

Before I briefly describe how it is working I wanted to take a few minutes to publicly thank some of the people who helped me to make it work so well and the people who helped me with this public meeting. Those people include Mike Goodman, Eddy Llaneras, and Rita Gibbons.

The Internet Forum started on July 5 and will be operational until August 11. Afterwards, it will be archived on the NHTSA web site. We will also prepare a report summarizing the content and post it there as well later this summer.

In terms of numbers, we had 16 technical papers that were written for the forum, which is great - given the short deadlines we had. These papers were submitted from the US, Canada, and several European countries. In addition, we have posted a number of other relevant technical papers. We were hoping to learn more from the Japanese experience where many drivers are already using in-vehicle devices. Hopefully we will get some additional contributions in the next few weeks.

In our Ask the Expert feature, we have gotten 15 technical experts to volunteer their time to answer questions. Surprisingly, they have only been asked a few questions. So while there is still time, log in to our site and try to stump the experts.

As of yesterday, about 2600 people have logged on, hundreds are taking the polls, and many people are contributing comments.

So much for the statistics. Let me give you a flavor of the technical information and comments. As I mentioned, we'll be summarizing all this in a report later this summer, but for now, I'll describe a few of the highlights.

The technical papers included several studies of various experimental procedures and measurements that are being proposed or employed to quantify the visual as well as cognitive demands of using in-vehicle technologies.

- A study of the capabilities of drivers to time share the driving scene information and in-vehicle display information.
- A study of the potential of collision avoidance warning systems to prevent distraction related crashes.
- A study of how speech based e-mail can affect driver attention.
- There are also some papers that describe the basic technical issues and challenges as well as the European Community approach to establishing principles for equipment design to minimize distraction.

Most of the public comments have focused on wireless phones, which is not surprising given their widespread use. We were hoping to hear more from users of other advanced technologies, such as navigation systems, wireless Internet, and entertainment systems - but may be those people are still reading their instruction manuals.

The public comments we received are interesting and informative and range from the amusing to the amazing and the tragic.

Among the informative topics was a report that Michigan has just begun to include a data element for cell phone use in their police crash report form, and a report from an automotive journalist discussing complicated navigation system controls and displays he has tested.

In the amusing category, a small gender war has erupted as women write that the problem is giving men more gadgets to play with-- Men who are not as good at multi-tasking as women who are used to talking on the phone while taking care of the kids and cooking dinner. However, some men are writing that the problem is women, such as the one who was reported to have let go of the steering wheel while on the cell phone to "talk with her hands"

A number of comments in the amazing category are reports of observing drivers watching a television mounted on the dash or reading books.

The tragic comments described personal involvement in crashes, including fatalities, caused by drivers using wireless phones and in one case a navigation system.

Of course, we've gotten a large number of opinions about what needs to be done about the distraction problem. Some of the opinions are in the comments.

Some are reflected in the polling questions, which is a feature designed to stimulate and focus discussion on various topics. It is not a scientific representation of public opinion. As examples of the sentiment of the people who have taken the time to respond to the questions, about 75 percent of them believe it is not safe to talk on a wireless phone while driving, about 50 percent of the people are concerned about all types of driver distractions not just cell phones, and about 65 percent of the people believe drivers do a poor job of deciding when it is safe to use in-vehicle technologies while driving.

So, if you haven't had time to check out our Internet Forum Website, please do. We have flyers for you on the table outside so that you can go right to your computer and log in after you leave this public meeting.

Again, I want to thank all who have contacted me seeking information and all those who are here. Let us make this a productive session.